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Recommendation for funding from other resources without a recommendation for funding from regular resources

Oman

Summary

The present document contains a recommendation for funding from other resources for the Oman country programme. The Executive Director *recommends* that the Executive Board approve $3,000,000 in other resources, subject to the availability of specific purpose contributions, for the period 2004 to 2006.

* E/ICEF/2003/11.

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Basic data (2001 unless otherwise stated)	
Child population (millions, under 18 years)	1.3
U5MR (per 1,000 live births)	13
Underweight (% moderate and severe) (2000)	18
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	23
Primary school attendance (% net, male/female) (1999)	90/88
Primary school children reaching grade 5 (%)	94
Use of improved drinking water sources (%) (2000)	39
Adult HIV prevalence (%)	0.11
Child work (%, 5-14 year-olds)	..
GNI per capita (US$)	*
One-year-olds immunized against DPT3 (%)	99
One-year-olds immunized against measles (%)	99

* 2001 estimate range is $2,976 to $9,205 (World Bank).

The situation of children and women

1. The Omani population is overwhelmingly young. According to government estimates, by mid-2001 the total population of Oman was 2.5 million, consisting of 1.8 million Omanis (74 per cent) and 700,000 expatriates (26 per cent). Some 1.3 million children are under 18 years of age. According to government estimates, Oman has a per-capita gross national income (GNI) of $6,720. Revenues from the petroleum industry constitute about three quarters of total government revenues, indicating a relative lack of diversification of its economy.

2. The infant mortality rate declined from over 100 per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 16 in 2001, while the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) dropped from over 146 per 1,000 live births to 13 in 2001. Trained health personnel attend to around 95 per cent of births in hospitals. Nearly 100 per cent of pregnant women have at least one antenatal check. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) increased from 16 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 23 in 2001, most likely because of an improved notification system, with fewer maternal deaths now remaining unreported. The immunization coverage rate of infants younger than 12 months of age against the seven leading killer childhood diseases has been sustained at over 98 per cent for a number of successive years.

3. Malnutrition rates among children under five years of age are high and are inconsistent with the overall progress achieved in health. Moderate and severe malnutrition affected around 18 per cent of children under five years in 2000, compared to 23 per cent in 1995. An estimated 10 per cent of schoolchildren suffer from malnutrition, with clear subnational disparities. For instance, while the malnutrition rate is 8 per cent in Dhofar and 13 per cent in Muscat, it is 27 per cent in North-Shariqiya and 23 per cent in Dakhliya. Despite the lack of adequate information on these disparities, they could be attributed to differences in the size of households, income and the proportion of income spent on food, as well as behaviour, caring practices and attitudes.

4. Access to pre-school educational facilities is very limited, with the best estimates of current rates of access at around 10 per cent. The Ministry of Education recognizes that most pre-school teachers are not adequately trained and that the majority of the buildings do not meet basic standards. The Government does not want to assume financial responsibility for pre-school education until the completion of its basic education reform programme, scheduled for 2018. There is room for improvement in childcare and stimulation practices at the household level. Many families entrust the responsibility for childcare to expatriate housemaids who are often untrained and overburdened with other domestic responsibilities. The majority of fathers are not directly involved in caring for and stimulating children during their early childhood.

5. The total net primary-school enrolment rate increased from 84 per cent in 1995 to 91 per cent in 2001, with negligible gender disparity. The percentage of primary-school entrants reaching grade five reached 94 per cent in 2001. The drop-out, failure and repetition rates among primary-school students are higher for boys than for girls. There is no mechanism to monitor systematically the quality aspects of education.

6. Oman does not have a national policy for the disabled, but efforts are under way to develop one. A standard system for service delivery and monitoring the situation of the disabled also remains to be established. Omani philanthropists are providing the bulk of financing for care and rehabilitation facilities for disabled children, but these reach only an estimated 5-10 per cent of disabled children, the total number of whom is probably underestimated. Over the last few years, a few Omani non-governmental associations were created with the specific purpose of providing much needed services to disabled children. Generally, there is a societal lack of awareness of the causes of disability and neglect of disabled children and their rights. The Government's budgetary allocation for the disabled has increased over the years, but important needs remain to be addressed.

7. There is no juvenile law in Oman and, consequently, no specialized juvenile courts. The age of criminal responsibility is set at nine years, which is alarmingly low. Juvenile offenders are currently dealt with by criminal courts. The main prison in Muscat is the only centre that provides a separate space for detained juveniles. Officials are currently studying a draft juvenile law that envisages special courts for juveniles. Oman has recently ratified International Labour Organization Convention 182, which prohibits hazardous child labour. In its review of Oman's initial report, in November 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child commended the ratification and stressed the importance of its enforcement to protect a number of Omani children currently involved in camel racing.

8. There is a need to develop effective life-skills programmes for adolescents and youth that focus on building such critical skills as responsibility, independence, self-reliance and assertion. Adolescents engage in practices that can lead to a mosaic of risks including HIV/AIDS. No strategy exists for fighting HIV/AIDS that focuses on educating young people to prevent and control its spread.

9. As children below the age of 18 years represent more than one half of the Omani population, more "space" needs to be devoted to young people's activities, not least to ensure that adolescents have a role in identifying and implementing solutions to challenges facing their generation. A culture that is conducive to child

participation is gradually emerging and needs to be nourished and encouraged through the media and the educational system.

Key results and lessons learned from previous cooperation, 2001-2003

Key results achieved

10. The previous country programme (2001-2003) resulted in a number of significant achievements. The institutionalization of an active Child Rights Committee has resulted in an enhanced process of monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee prompted the completion of a number of studies related to child rights, such as a study of the modes of child treatment and behavioural correction of children and a survey of the level of awareness of child rights. The findings of these studies will contribute to the formulation of appropriate policies to promote and protect children's rights. Oman is soon expected to withdraw most of its reservations to the Convention as a result of the Child Rights Committee's recommendations. The Committee played also an important role in finalizing the draft juvenile law.

11. A draft women's development strategy has been finalized, marking an important milestone on the road to women's empowerment. A survey of women's status and needs has been instrumental in defining the priorities that need to be addressed by implementing the women's development strategy.

12. An in-depth study of the knowledge and attitudinal factors contributing to child malnutrition has provided good findings and insights that currently are being used to design a social marketing campaign to address the deeper social causes of child malnutrition. The establishment of a core team of national trainers to enhance breastfeeding and complementary feeding promotion skills, represents a significant addition to Oman's capacity to address malnutrition.

13. An Education for All work plan was developed for the period 2003-2015. With a view to improving further the quality of basic education, an investigation is currently under way into the underlying causes of repetition, failure and dropout in grade seven.

14. The establishment of a group of peer counsellors in healthy lifestyles and HIV/AIDS education among secondary school students was an important contribution to ongoing efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

15. The creation of a computerized social database, using *ChildInfo*, facilitates the retrieval of social data on Oman in accordance with international indicators, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals.

Lessons learned

16. The past years have shown that the commitment of the Government of Oman to the cause of children and women has been the greatest asset of the country programme of cooperation. Given the magnitude of government financial support to joint activities, the UNICEF contribution to the major achievements of Oman in recent years is best described as catalytic advocacy and technical assistance, with an impact far beyond its financial contribution alone. There is a gap between the challenges facing children in Oman and the demand for UNICEF involvement on the one hand, and the organization's very limited resources on the other. This fact was

kept in mind while developing the new country programme, under which UNICEF support will concentrate on specialized technical assistance for policy formulation and programme development.

17. The limited availability of Arabic-speaking, high-level consultants and resource persons and institutions has been a challenge to the effective implementation of certain activities that required external expertise. This has been most evident in relation to child rights, early childhood development and adolescents' issues.

18. Because of its GNI and U5MR, Oman has surpassed the Executive Board's criteria to qualify for regular resources. Oman is among the first such countries making the transition to a country programme based only on other resources. The preparation of the present country programme has been a challenge at times, given the dearth of precedents globally, as the road map had to be developed during the journey. The Government's strong commitment to the continued in-country presence of UNICEF and its involvement during the planning process can serve as an example to other countries facing similar situations.

The country programme, 2004-2006

Estimated expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

Programme	*Other resources*
Integrated early childhood development	850
Development and protection of children and young people	900
Planning, monitoring and evaluation	550
Cross-sectoral costs	700
Total	**3 000**

19. The country programme (2004-2006) will be funded by other resources only. Funds received against the approved ceiling of $3 million will be used to cover all programme expenses, in addition to those operational expenses that are not covered by the UNICEF support budget. The Government of Oman has pledged to provide around 50 per cent of the approved other resources ceiling. Additional funding from the Omani private sector and other donors will be required for full implementation of all the country programme components.

Preparation process

20. The process of preparing the new country programme has been unique in terms of government involvement at senior and middle levels. Because this new programme will be crucially dependent on government funding, it was necessary to discuss and negotiate the programme very thoroughly with senior government officials at the Under-Secretary level involving four partner ministries. The UNICEF Regional Director visited Oman and discussed arrangements for the new country programme at ministerial and Under-Secretary levels. The process took over six months. In response to the UNICEF decision gradually to scale back its presence in

Oman, the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development each seconded a full-time professional staff member to the UNICEF office. These three officials have ensured unique government involvement in the preparation of this new country programme. Bilateral meetings were held with the three main partner Ministries of Social Development, Education, and Health, where details of proposed projects were agreed. Draft outline versions of the new programme were circulated to all partners in both English and Arabic. A strategy paper was prepared and discussed in a strategy meeting that brought together senior government officials, senior staff from the UNICEF Regional Office, staff from the country office and the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Oman.

Goals, key results and strategies

21. The main goal of the country programme is to assist the Government of Oman in developing child-focused national policies and programmes and to further the realization of the principles and articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The country programme aims to achieve 10 key results:

(a) Increasing parental knowledge of basic underlying causes of child malnutrition and how to address them;

(b) Increasing the average score of correct answers achieved by students in measurement of learning achievement (MLA) tests from the current 51 per cent to a minimum of 60 per cent by 2006;

(c) Adoption of the bill of the juvenile law as a critical step in the creation of a protective legal environment for children;

(d) Prohibition of the use of children as camel jockeys;

(e) Increased public awareness of child rights and the harms against which children need to be protected;

(f) Increased adolescents' knowledge of basic life skills;

(g) Increased attention to adolescents' and young people's needs for development and protection;

(h) Increased adolescents' knowledge of HIV/AIDS and means of protection;

(i) Timely submission of a high-quality first regular report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child;

(j) A fair measurement of the effectiveness of the new country programme which will assist in determining future cooperation between UNICEF and the Government.

22. Advocacy and national capacity-building are the two main strategies of the country programme. UNICEF will focus on national policy and programme development. High-level advocacy is needed to ensure steady progress towards the achievement of all key results, which is particularly critical for such new areas as juvenile justice, child labour and child abuse. Training and technical assistance will be used to enhance national capacities to analyse situations and develop appropriate policies and programmes to address situations that require further improvement. As part of national policy and programme analysis, UNICEF will also support critical studies and research. The integrated early childhood development programme will

focus on children younger than six years old, while the development and protection of children and young people programme will focus on those six years and older. The operational scope of the country programme will be national, except for a research focus to identify subnational disparities, using this for advocacy and planning purposes, in addition to regular field monitoring visits.

Relationship to national priorities and the UNDAF

23. The country programme is in line with the Government's Sixth Five-year Development Plan. In the area of health, the country programme addresses child malnutrition and HIV/AIDS, which are two major priorities of the Ministry of Health under the five-year plan. Further improvement of the quality of basic education, and expansion and improved quality of pre-school education are in line with the priorities of the Ministry of Education. Child protection and monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are high priorities for the Ministry of Social Development and the Omani Child Rights Committee. WHO is the only other United Nations agency with a presence in Oman and it has been agreed not to develop a United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

Relationship to international priorities

24. The country programme directly contributes to the Millennium Development Goals related to reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, achieving universal primary education and combating HIV/AIDS, and to section VI of the Millennium Declaration on protecting the vulnerable. With regard to the goals of *A World Fit for Children*, the new programme contributes to promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting children against neglect, abuse and exploitation, and combating HIV/AIDS. It also addresses the priorities of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan related to integrated early childhood development; improved protection of children against neglect, abuse, and exploitation; and fighting HIV/AIDS. Finally, the programme also addresses the UNICEF regional priority on adolescents' development and participation.

Programme components

25. The **integrated early childhood development** programme is designed to address: (a) inadequate care and stimulation for children below the age of five years; (b) high malnutrition rates; (c) high reliance on untrained expatriate housemaids and low involvement of fathers; (d) the lack of nutritional awareness; (e) the high rate of inadequately spaced pregnancies and deliveries; and (f) the low level of pre-school enrolment and poor quality of pre-school education.

26. The *better parenting and pre-school learning and stimulation* project aims to enhance the quality of parental childcare and stimulation and to improve access to and quality of pre-school education. UNICEF will support: (a) the development of a better parenting information package; (b) the design of a national parental awareness-raising programme that employs both mass media and interpersonal communication; (c) the development of indicators to measure parental and caregivers' awareness of effective childcare and stimulation practices; (d) the development of alternative financing options for pre-school education that attracts both the non-profit and commercial sectors; and (e) the development of quality

control standards that the Ministry of Education will use for overseeing the performance of pre-schools.

27. The *malnutrition reduction* project aims to contribute to the Ministry of Health's efforts to reduce the malnutrition rate among children below five years to 14 per cent by 2005. This project links with the better parenting approaches to be addressed more directly by the previous project. The activities that UNICEF will support include: (a) designing of more effective multisectoral strategies and national programmes for raising parents' and caregivers' awareness of the underlying causes and consequences of malnutrition; (b) advocating among concerned authorities for improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation on the basis of findings of research and evaluations undertaken by other partners; and (c) advocating and providing technical support for the continued implementation of the social marketing plan to address child malnutrition.

28. The key results expected from this programme include: (a) improved quality of parental childcare at home; (b) increased pre-school enrolment by at least 40 per cent; (c) improved quality of pre-school services; and (d) increased parental knowledge of the basic underlying causes of child malnutrition and how to address them.

29. The **development and protection of children and young people** programme is designed to address: (a) students' low levels of academic achievement in grades 1-10; (b) the lack of a national policy to safeguard the rights and interests of children with disabilities; (c) inadequate government funding of services targeting children with disabilities; (d) neglect of children with mental disabilities; (e) the low age of criminal responsibility (nine years) and the absence of a juvenile law; (f) the involvement of young children in camel racing; and (g) the lack of credible sources of reliable information needed by adolescents for their health and social protection.

30. The *quality education* project aims to support government efforts to strengthen the quality aspects of the Basic Education Project, an ongoing government programme for reform in grades 1-10. UNICEF will support systematizing the MLA studies throughout the basic education system, and a rigorous implementation of the recommendations of MLA studies to improve further teaching and learning processes.

31. The *legal and social protection of children and young people* project aims to create a protective social and legal environment for children and young people. The project has two subcomponents: (a) enhancement of juvenile justice in Oman in terms of both legislation and legal practice; and (b) promoting appropriate modes of child treatment in families and communities, and the introduction of special protection measures for disabled children, children of unknown parents and children involved in hazardous activities. Activities to be supported will include: (a) advocating the enactment of a fair juvenile law; (b) increasing public awareness of child rights and the risks against which children need to be protected; (c) advocating for the creation of legislation that prohibits the use of young children in camel racing; (d) creation of a reporting system for child abuse cases; and (e) creation of an independent body responsible for addressing cases of child abuse, neglect and exploitation.

32. The *life skills for adolescents* project aims to promote healthy lifestyles and behaviours and to prevent HIV/AIDS and other health and social hazards. Activities

supported by UNICEF will include: (a) government efforts to create a national strategy to enhance adolescents' knowledge of and attitudes towards healthy lifestyles; (b) national awareness-raising programmes targeting adolescents and young people; and (c) advocating for the establishment of social programmes and facilities for adolescents and youth.

33. Key results expected from this programme include: (a) increasing the average score of correct answers achieved by students in MLA tests from the current 51 per cent to a minimum of 60 per cent by 2006; (b) creation of a protective social and legal environment for juveniles; (c) introduction of special protection measures for disabled children, children of unknown parents and children involved in camel racing; (d) increased adolescents' knowledge of basic life skills and development of their critical thinking, assertiveness and self-reliance; and (e) enhanced adolescents' knowledge of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it.

34. The **planning, monitoring and evaluation** programme aims to attract additional funding for the country programme; ensure close monitoring of achievements against the objectives of the country programme; and ensure effective monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Activities will include: (a) the development and implementation of an integrated monitoring and evaluation plan; (b) forging of partnerships with the private sector in Oman and development of joint fund-raising campaigns; (c) preparation and submission of funding proposals to interested international donors; (d) monitoring the situation of children and women through field visits, research and studies; and (e) conducting a formal evaluation of the country programme in 2006 to assess the degree of achievement against its set objectives.

35. The expected results from this programme are: (a) enhanced ability to detect emerging issues related to children and women situation in Oman; (b) increased other resources funding; (c) timely submission of a high-quality first regular report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and (d) a fair measurement of the effectiveness of the new country programme to determine the nature of future cooperation between UNICEF and the Government.

36. The **cross-sectoral costs** will cover such expenses as utility bills, fuel and car maintenance, furniture and office equipment, and the salaries of a driver and a bilingual secretary. Many of the operational expenses that in the past were covered under the support budget are now covered under this budget line item.

Major partnerships

37. The Ministry of Social Development will continue to have primary responsibility for the country programme of cooperation between the Government of Oman and UNICEF. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to be the focal point for all issues related to UNICEF in terms of country representation and diplomatic affairs.

38. The projects and activities of the country programme are designed in such a way that intersectoral collaboration is required for achievement of all key results. While the Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and National Economy each are expected to assume responsibility as focal points for certain projects or subprojects, the involvement of other governmental and non-governmental bodies will be essential for the effective achievement of planned

results. The achievement of key results will involve working more closely with such partners as the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Royal Oman Police, which were not directly involved in earlier country programmes.

39. It is recognized that civil society organizations are just beginning to emerge in Oman. The existence of non-governmental associations capable of assuming major responsibilities in social development is still limited. As a result, the full and effective implementation of this country programme will depend on partnerships with and among governmental bodies, with existing non-governmental bodies involved to the maximum extent feasible.

40. The implementation of the country programme will involve at least 11 main governmental bodies in addition to several non-governmental associations, the Omani Child Rights Committee, WHO, the United Nations Population Fund, through its regional country support team based in Jordan, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, through its regional office in Cairo.

41. The Ministry of Social Development will have primary responsibility for all issues related to child protection. The Ministry of Health will be the partner for interventions in the areas of malnutrition, healthy lifestyles and combating HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Education will continue to assume responsibility for quality education and pre-school education. The Ministry of Information will be a key partner in the communication and mobilization components of all programmes. The General Organization of Youth, Sports and Cultural Activities and the Scouts and Guides Organization will be key partners for life skills for adolescents.

Monitoring, evaluation and programme management

42. Monitoring and evaluation are integral parts of the programme implementation process. Oman is a "data rich" country, and the various studies and surveys completed over the previous programme cycles, in addition to those planned under the current programme, will constitute a benchmark for monitoring and evaluation. The Omani Child Rights Committee will play a central role in the process of monitoring the situation of children and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The integrated monitoring and evaluation plan will provide the required framework and mechanism for the effective monitoring and evaluation of this country programme. Annual review and planning meetings will be critical to the process of effective monitoring and evaluation. A mid-term review is not required for this short-duration programme.

43. The management of the new country programme will pose some challenges, as there will be a reduction in the number of UNICEF staff. The three government staff members seconded to UNICEF during the 2001-2003 programme cycle and trained in UNICEF programming policies and procedures, will be vital to the effective management of the programme. Further investment in training and capacity-building of current and future seconded government staff will be critical for smooth implementation of the country programme. Intraregional networking and exchanges of experience will be encouraged, and UNICEF Oman will seek particularly to strengthen its ties with the Gulf Area Office in Riyadh, in the interest of mutually reinforcing programme strategies and management modalities.